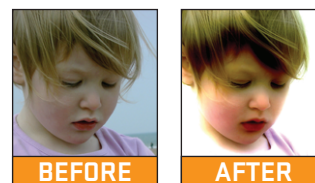


HOW TO...

Add sunshine to photos



If you can't get the weather to play nice when you've found the perfect composition, you can always use artificial means to brighten up a shot. Adam Banks explains how you can cheer up those dreary snaps using Photoshop Elements 5

Bright blue skies make for perfect, feel-good photos. But you might have to wait a while for the sun to come out. As a keen digital photographer, however, you'll know how to get around this one: cheat.

In this article, we present five handy techniques for making a photograph look as if it has been shot in weather Britons can usually only dream about. We've used Adobe Photoshop Elements 5, but similar commands are available in other good image-editing programs, too. To get the exact result you want on a particular photograph you may have to try more than one method, or combine several. In each case, there are settings and sliders you can tweak to fine-tune the effect.

When experimenting, trust your instincts. Keep in mind the result you want: high contrast, with dark shadows and bright highlights, and colour balance tipped towards the hot end of the spectrum. Like any image-editing technique, these tricks can be repurposed and abused to create different effects. For example, having overlaid a heavily blurred image, as in Steps 5 to 8, you can change its blending mode to Darken to simulate a hand-tinted photograph.

Finally, if you're having trouble getting a satisfactory result when layering an image as described here, try this quick fix. Go to Filter, Adjustments, Equalize. Apply this both to your copied image layer and the original Background layer below.

1 Run Photoshop Elements 5 and choose Edit and Enhance Photos. When the program starts, open your image file using Open from the File menu or by pressing Ctrl-O. The photo in our example shows an exciting piece of architecture, but looks dull because it was taken on a cloudy day with standard automatic camera settings. To simulate brighter weather, start by increasing contrast; full sun creates bright highlights and deep shadows. There are various commands you could use, but the best place to start is Levels. In Photoshop Elements, go to Enhance, Adjust Lighting, Levels, or press Ctrl-L.

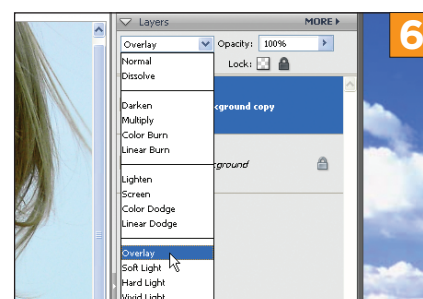
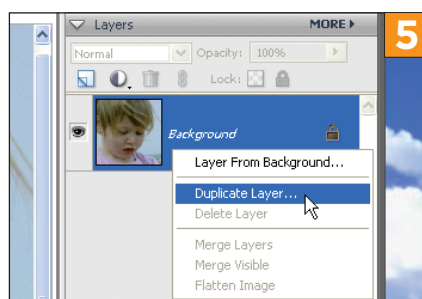
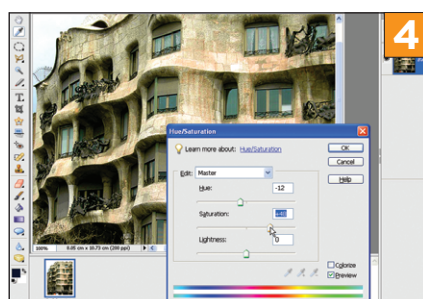
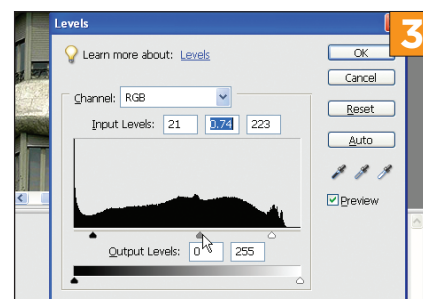
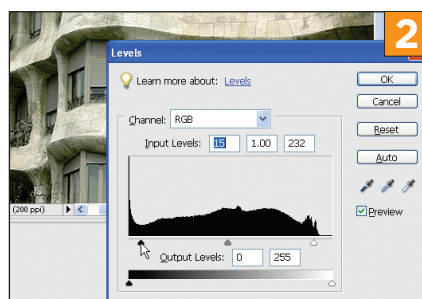
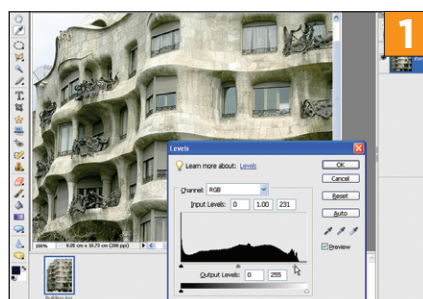
2 The Levels dialog box displays the image's histogram. This is a bar chart of all the pixel values in the image, from dark to light. The higher the black line at each point along the scale, the more pixels in the image correspond to that lightness value. The sliders below let you change the distribution of pixel values to alter the overall appearance of the picture. Make sure Preview is ticked so your changes are reflected immediately. First, drag the white slider at the right towards the middle of the scale to push more pixels up to the lightest values, brightening the highlights in the photo. If there's a gap at the end of the scale with no values, as seen here, drag the slider at least this far. Then, looking at the image itself, stop moving the slider when you see detail beginning to disappear from the photo as light areas are 'blown out'. Highlights are

considered 'blown out' when the lighter areas of the image become plain white.

3 Drag the black slider at the left towards the middle of the scale to push more pixels down to the lowest values, deepening shadows. Again, make sure there are no unused values to the left of the slider, but don't take it too far to the right or you'll lose detail from the image and make it too dark overall. Finally, you can use the grey slider in the middle of the scale to adjust the overall bias of the image's midtones towards dark or light; the setting is known as gamma. Having adjusted the black and white points as described here, you'll find that decreasing the gamma (moving the grey slider to the right) increases the impression of contrast. Click OK to apply your Levels changes.

4 After contrast, the other difference between sunny and overcast lighting is colour balance. Remember, blue looks cold and red looks hot. Neutral light is white (colourless), but sunlight is yellow. Open the Hue/Saturation dialog box by going to Enhance, Adjust Color, Adjust Hue/Saturation, or pressing Ctrl-U. Drag the Hue slider to change the image's overall colour cast, aiming to make it slightly more red/yellow as opposed to green/blue. In this case, a short distance to the left has the desired effect.

Then increase the Saturation to make the image more vivid, revealing colour in areas that



previously looked almost grey. Don't make it too garish, though. Press OK to apply your Hue/Saturation changes.

5 There's a different way to make a picture 'hotter', which often works well with portrait shots. Starting with an unedited photo, make a new layer containing the same image. You can do this with the Duplicate Layer command, available from the Layer menu or from the pop-up menu at the top right of the Layers palette, or by right-clicking on the Background layer in the Layers palette. Click OK in the dialog box that appears.

6 In the Layers palette, you now have two layers: Background and Background Copy. If you can see the title Layers on the right but don't see these layers listed, click on the disclosure triangle next to the title to expand the palette. If you can't see the Layers palette at all, open it by choosing its name in the Windows menu. With Background Copy selected, you can change its layer-blending mode from Normal, the default, to any of Photoshop Elements' 22 other options. These combine the two layers in different ways. Try Overlay, which increases contrast by lightening the lighter areas and darkening the darker ones, giving a bolder image. The result is subtler and more photographic than a Levels adjustment.

7 For a more dramatic effect, try switching the blending mode to Vivid Light. This boosts colour as well as contrast, rather like the Saturation increase in Step 4. You may find the effect unsatisfactory at first. For example, the image may become dark and muddy. To tone down the result, you can reduce the layer's Opacity setting, shown next to its blending mode in the Layers palette.

For a really hot look, exaggerate the effect instead. With your Vivid Light layer active, go to Levels (Enhance, Adjust Lighting, Levels, or press Ctrl-L) and pull in the black and white sliders as in Steps 2 and 3. Then increase the gamma by dragging the grey slider to the left. Adjusting the effect by eye, you should get a high-contrast,

high-key image, blowing out all the highlights while giving deep black shadows and bringing out the reds and yellows in the flesh tones. The impression is of a picture taken in extremely bright sunlight.

Try other blending modes, with or without Levels adjustment, for different effects. For example, Color Burn gives a variation on the same kind of result as Overlay and Vivid Light. Difference and Exclusion turn the image into a negative, allowing weird special effects.

8 There's one feature associated with brightly lit images that you haven't yet simulated: very bright highlights tend to appear blurred. To create this effect, blur your top layer while leaving the original image intact in the Background layer, and use an appropriate blending mode. With your Background Copy layer active, go to Filter, Blur, Gaussian Blur. Adjust the Radius setting to control the amount of blurring. You'll find a small amount just makes the picture look blurred, but as you increase the Radius to extreme amounts – at least 30 pixels – the blurred effect gives way to a soft glow.

9 Sometimes you won't be able to get the result you want from a photo because the raw material just isn't there. It's not unusual, for example, to find that even when shooting on a sunny day you've ended up with what looks like a blank white or grey sky. No amount of fiddling with Levels and Saturation will make it look the way you remember. Here you should do what professional photographers do and resort to some unashamedly artificial interference.

One way to guarantee a deep blue sky in any picture is to fit the camera with a lens filter that has the top half or third tinted blue. However, if you didn't do this, you can reproduce the same effect easily in software. Open your image in Photoshop Elements, then add a new layer by clicking on the button with the icon of a turning page at the top left of the Layers palette. Set the new layer's blending mode to Multiply. This

EXPERT TIP

Adjustments such as Levels are 'destructive', which means some data is lost from the image every time they are applied. If you need to tweak the effect, undo (Ctrl-Z) and retry rather than adjusting repeatedly.

mode works in the same way as placing a filter over a lens, or one photographic transparency over another.

10 Set the colour you want for your sky by clicking the Foreground colour swatch at the foot of the main toolbox on the left (of the two squares, it's the one at the top left that appears in front of the other). In the Color Picker dialog box, choose a deep blue. If you're not sure which shade to go for, try entering RGB values of 50, 80, 150. Click OK to make this the Foreground colour.

11 Now switch to the Gradient tool; either click on the fourth icon from the bottom in the toolbox on the left of the screen, or press G. From the gradient picker that appears at the left of the Options toolbar at the top of the screen, choose the second swatch, Foreground to Transparent. (If you don't see this swatch, as shown in our screenshot, click on the triangle icon at the top right of the picker to pop up a menu; from the sets of gradients at the bottom of this choose Default.) Click on the first of the five small icons to the right of this to select a Linear Gradient. Then click about a quarter of the way down from the top of your photo to where the landscape meets the sky (it doesn't matter about your position from left to right), and drag down to a little way into the landscape. Release the mouse button to apply your gradient.

12 The way the blue fades out towards the horizon, leaving a sort of glow above the landscape, looks quite realistic. If you're not happy with your first attempt, click and drag again to replace the gradient until it looks right. Don't drag too far down into the landscape, or you'll give it an unnatural blue cast.

Don't be afraid to overlap the gradient generously. If you don't like the blue you've chosen, just click the Foreground colour swatch, change the colour, then apply the gradient again; there's no need to undo or delete your gradient before re-creating it.

